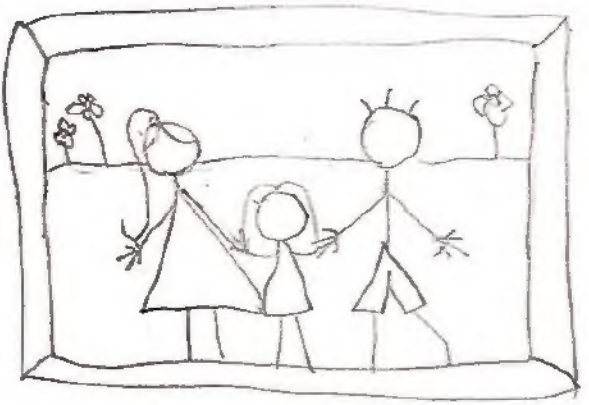
Pag-uwi

UPLB Writers' Club



Terminal
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Taunang Gawi
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A Daughter like her Mother
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(In My Home)
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Swimming Lessons
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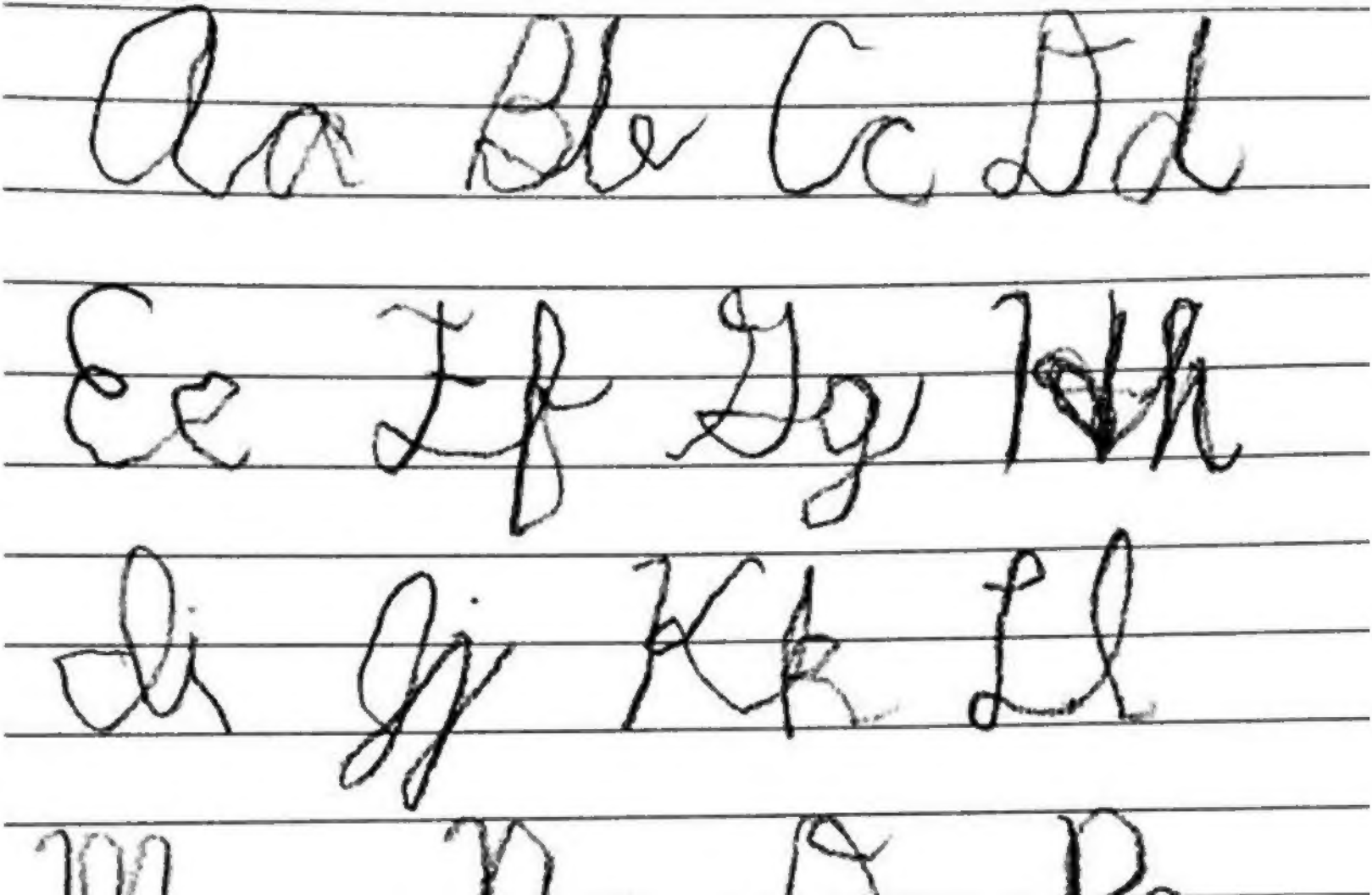
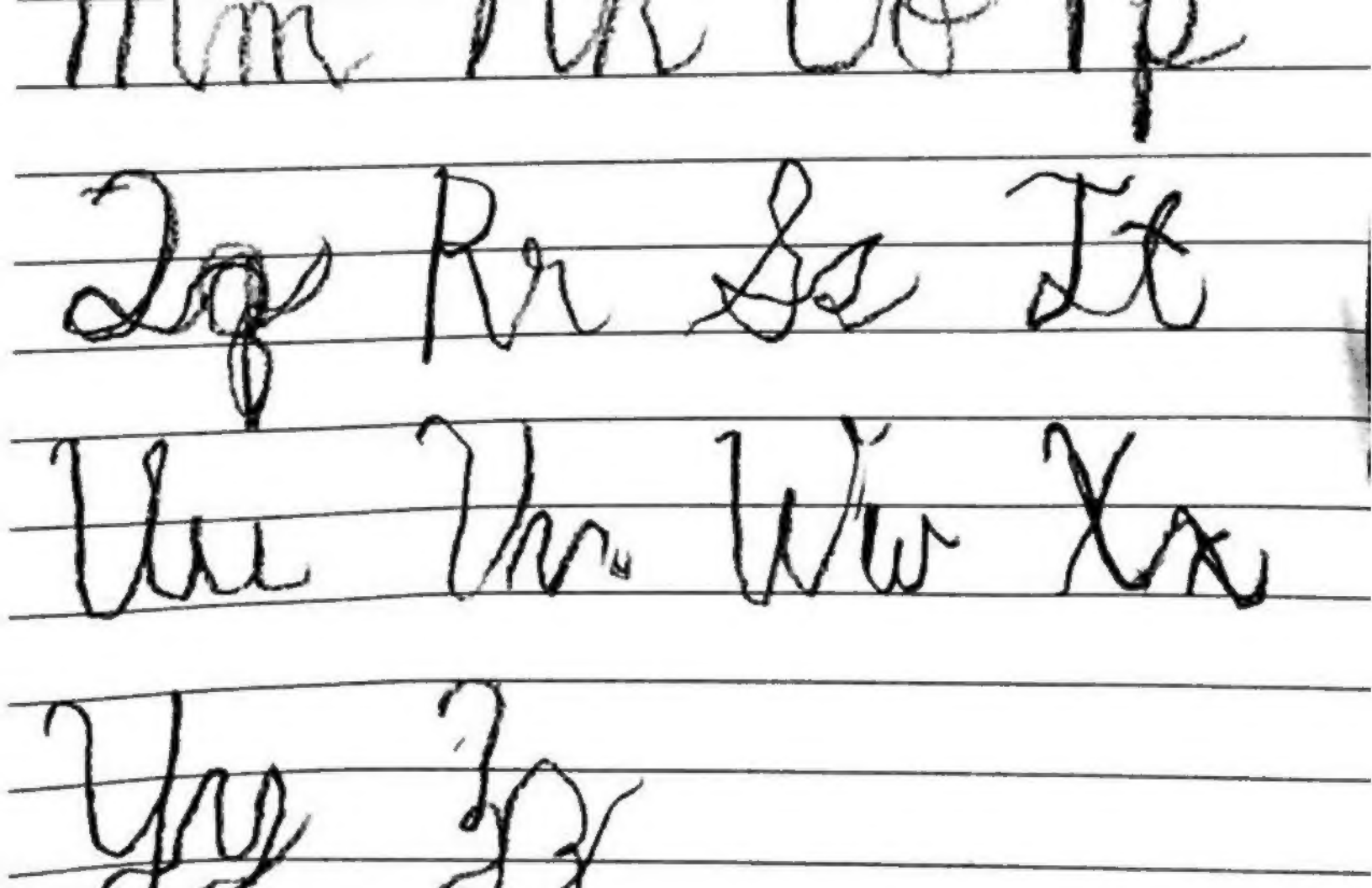
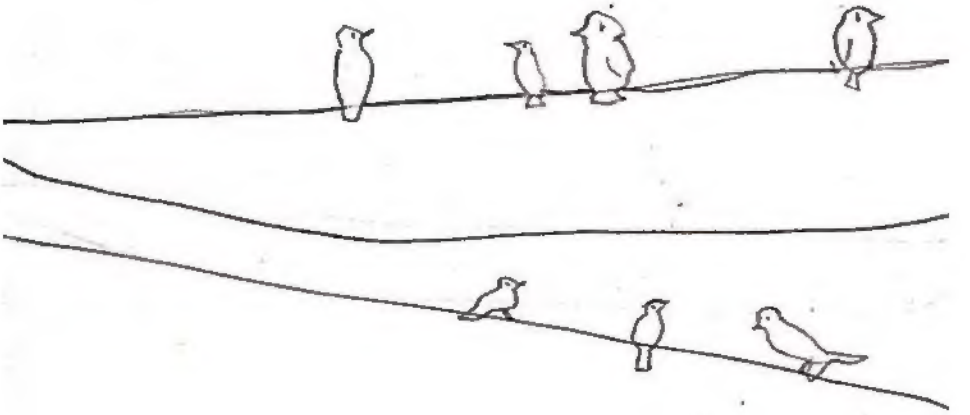






terminal

John Daryl Alcantara

moving out

there are far too many birds overhead and not enough power lines to rest on.

it's another saturday on the road with your mother who reminds you to watch out for vehicles before crossing the streets. you remember how the concrete mall bleeds the same color as the almost-evening sky and how she grabs your hand when a provincial bus almost hit your young body. she strides on, faster this time, and you try your best to catch her pace. you ask her how did the baby birds learn to fly & when she was about to answer a barker interrupts.

the last jeepney was almost full & there was no room for turning back.

balancing act

it would take you months before you learn how to stop waiting for your father's return, but you don't know about it yet. today you are riding the bicycle he gave you on your first graduation rites without him. your mother tells you not to look back once she stops pushing you. focus, she shouts, so you could reach that intersection of pavements that divide these endless fields of grass into grids.

tall buildings would populate this district soon & this street, these empty blocks, your scrapped left knee, the way sunlight falls on your semi-bald head, and the way your arms cling onto

your mother's—will all just be trivial details of a fading photograph. you smile, not knowing all this innocence is a temporary privilege.

stitching lesson

when she couldn't push any harder the doctors would decide it's time to cut her open. today, you are too young to understand how a c-section works or even how traffic lights tell pedestrians when it's safe to cross & when it's not.

she runs her index finger on a vertical scar just below her navel & tells you this is where you came out to this world & somehow, *somehow*, that's more than enough explanation.

today she hands you a folder that seems heavier than it should be. your mother trusts that you know these jargons that she cannot articulate on her own. another operation is scheduled to leave her with another stitch—a horizontal one this time—because something needs to be taken out; the human body, you convince yourself, is not a simple game of a tower of wooden blocks, but you cannot ignore the crack on the charity ward's wall.

she notices the blinking fluorescents starting to dim, or maybe it's just the anesthetic working.

body electric

they've already warned her about the inevitable hairfall but it still caught her off guard, not in an instant, no, (although that would have been less painful,) but in a series of waking moments, each one seemingly worse than the morning before.

tonight, she decides not to sleep with a bedsheet on. she insists it's easier this way to collect the debris. they're technically just dead cells, you tell her, but you still cannot help but see her less & less & less alive as the bald spots widen.

you decide to come home from college, one afternoon, again as the child you once were when you still liked biking. in a carelessly executed but nonetheless sincere way, you tell her you can better feel the wind this way. she looks at you with a faint smile.

the resemblance is way worse than uncanny.

disconnection notice

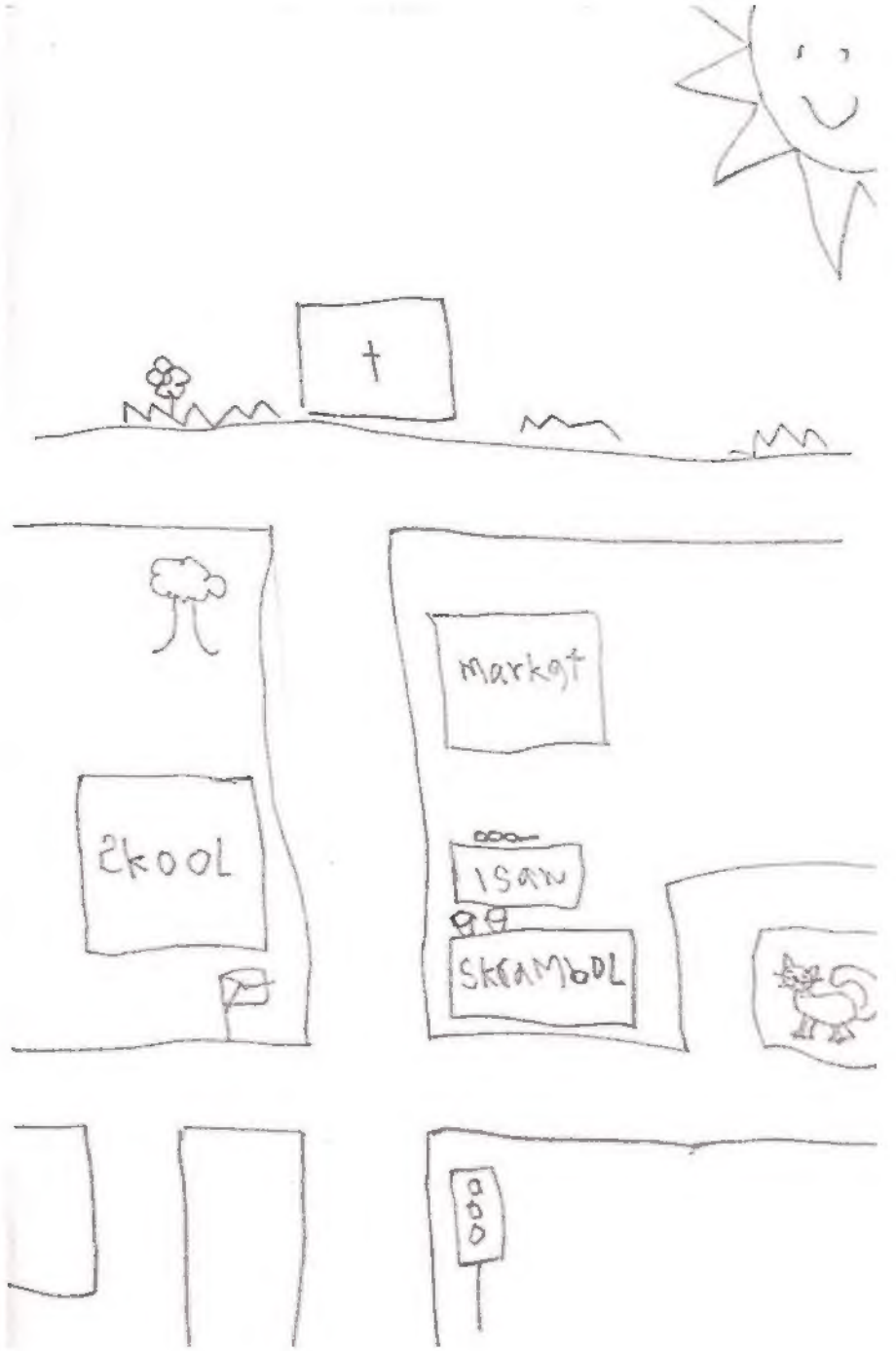
it's a known fact that skylines look prettier in photos with powerlines buried in thick veins that run parallel to the streets. there are trees, still, but their arms are not supposed to be big enough to be called home. there isn't much choice to begin with.

green means she'd go ahead, and won't look back, no matter how fast you try to walk beside her.

yellow means breathe, there's more to these moments of hairlessness, of quiet uncertainties, of trying to bleed every debit card dry of their maintaining balance.

red is a lot more complicated.

the diagnosis tells you simply: there are no rooms for birds in this new district, they have to pay their bills on time or else they'd just grow weary and fall from the sky. the doctor interrupts. you speak of an untreatable cancer, so he tells your mother another story.


†
Markgt
2kool
ISaw
SKeAMbOL

Taunang Gawi

Mary Joyce Bernal

Sa likod ng jeepney
sumisilid ka sa alaala–
ang asul na tsinelas ng mamang nasa harap
ang samyo ng Philip mula kay manong
ang punit na manggas ng nasa dulo

Berde, kahel, pula–
hihinahon ang makina
lalabas ang mga pamaypay
liliko ang mga leeg patungo sa harapan
magsisimula ang bagong kanta

Sa kabila ng alingawngaw
ng mga motorista
ng mga tindera
ng siyudad sa umaga–
aawit kang kasabay si Renz Verano

Magmula noon
sa masikip na kusina
hanggang sa ngayon
hawak mo ang bisig ni inay
ikaw lamang ang inibig
saksi ako sa pag-ugoy

Lulunurin ang kanta
ng ugong ng andar,
sasama ang boses mo sa
alon ng lumisang mga nota

Tanaw ko na ang nakadungaw
na nagtatayugang mga kahon
sa likod ng dingding na
inaakyatan ng mga musmos,
hawak ang pira-pirasong mga kandila

Sa pag-itsa ng nalalabing sigarilyo
tatanungin ni manong–
"may bababa ho ba?"
hihigpit ang mga daliri
sa pinag-ipunang bungkos
"wala po."

Bakuran

Raffy Bautista

When I was six, I noticed how the lines of the two telephones in our house were connected. If one phone is ringing, the other rings as well and answering from either of the phones stops both from ringing. If someone answers from tita's room upstairs, I can listen to their conversation using the phone from the living room.

One day, a cousin and I decided to play around with this discovery. The phone rang and stopped eventually so we both knew that it was either because our tita answered the call from her room or the call was cancelled. We picked up the phone to find out.

I still remember how the summer heat of that day was amplified by the moisture trapped by the concrete walls of the house. We were neither allowed to go outside to play in our backyard nor turn on the TV because it was siesta time. Bored, we listened to the conversation between our tita and the caller – a man.

I thought, and my cousin might have also thought, we were going to hear an exchange between sweethearts, but we were wrong. I cannot remember the details of their conversation anymore. I can only remember that my tita was anxious and crying. Their exchange intensified as the

anxious cries of our tita turned into shouting that echoed through the walls of her room By then we have decided to stop listening

I became nervous when we dropped the call from our side because I knew that our tita would notice the beep that came with it I was right Tita came out of her room furious She rushed out of her room and angrily walked down the stairs The steps trembled as much as my hands shook and my sweat lingered on the edges of my eyebrows I was, for the very first time, afraid of my tita.

Of all my aunts and uncles, Tita Irene was my favorite I remember when she once tasked me to write all the numbers from one to one-hundred with the promise that I will get a prize if I did perfectly Unfortunately, I missed forty-nine She did not give me the prize, but she kept the paper as a reminder that I almost did the task at a young age She would occasionally hold contests like spelling quizzes or simple math drills for me and my cousins She would also cook snacks or prepare fruit shakes for all of us She was an angel A mother to all of us who were not her own

The trembling I shared with my cousin intensified into crying with every step our tita took towards us Defensively, we apologized We cried that we did not intend to listen to their heated exchange We only wanted to hear how lovers talked in the physical absence of each other I was expecting her to scold us, but she stooped before us and hugged us instead She told us not talk about what we heard Our trembling stopped The reason we were crying became obscure I might be imagining it, but I felt her hug tighten It was as if she was looking for comfort in our presence --- in our innocence We all stopped crying eventually

This is what modern communication technologies cannot capture The nuances of physical interactions can send signals that transcend the boundaries of language Have tita Irene discovered that we were eavesdropping via a Skype or Facebook videocall, my cousin and I would not have trembled, cried, and hugged with her She would not have been reminded of children's innocence.

Weeks later, she told our grandmother of her pregnancy. She became a single mom.

The first hint that there was a problem in my relationship with my family was exposed when I was in sixth grade My teacher in *Language and Grammar* asked us whether we will choose our friends over our family in a specific scenario I cannot remember anymore

Initially, I answered that I will choose my family because they were my best friends The simple answer I gave was enough to spark a light conversation among the members of the class They started talking about how their families helped them solve their problems Some of them blissfully described their family bonding activities A lot did not share anything

I wonder what those who remained quiet had to share In 2008, 38 percent of the babies born in the Philippines were delivered by unmarried mothers Maybe, some of those who stayed quiet were raised by single parents In my college days, I met people who were raised by their grandparents or other relatives because their parents died young What if someone from my class of more than forty students was gripping her desk, struggling to contain his tears because of the envious feelings she felt towards those

with normal families? If an orphan or a street child heard a recording of that day, what would he say?

The stories my classmates shared illuminated an aspect of my life I did not know existed. I was unhappy with my family I realized that since fifth grade, my parents have not asked me about how my days went They did not know who my friends were and how I spent my time with them They were clueless about my aspirations and passions in life, what I liked, who I loved, and what gender I preferred. I have never had the liberty to express myself as a response to the hormonal and other developmental changes my physical body had to go through I was never me in our house I was never at home

I have never been confident of confronting my parents about my personal issues. The lack of attention from them made me feel that my voice is not important, and that the stories that concerned myself mattered to no one else but me I became talkative, extroverted even I subconsciously sought for connections that would allow my sentiments to seep through small talks because my soul wanted to be known I was searching for a home So, I raised my hand and answered again, *I'll choose my friends because they know me better*

A Daughter Like Her Mother

Seth Vera Castrodes

Mama refused to let someone she loved lose who she was.

Evena clutched my arm, her eyes distant. I followed her gaze and saw her brother waving in the distance. He stood there for a moment, and it might have felt longer than it should have, but I ignored the urge to raise my arm and wave back. His figure disappeared in the airport entrance thereafter.

It was different from when my husband left. Everything felt lighter when he left. Like I lost someone I should have lost long before.

It felt wrong not being there with my son leaving, but I couldn't go there too.

Pride does run in the family.

Evena shed no tears, when I expected her to. I shed no tears, when I expected myself to. When she looked at me, there was nothing that her eyes showed.

I wonder if my eyes show some semblance of the loss I expected to feel.

I knelt down, and brushed down some of her hair from her face, "Do you want some ice cream?"

What does she see?

She smiled, "Chocolate."

"You had too much yesterday."

Her face scrunched up in a frown I couldn't help but laugh

"Fine, fine."

When she smiled, it was beautiful, somehow like mother's.

"Thanks, Mama."

To be defined by her past

My grandmother refused to live without leaving everything she knew

Once the *harana* played outside, I stopped folding my clothes I left my room, switching the lights off I should have cooked earlier, but I could not be late this time

I'm almost done, anyway.

I don't have too much time

With them

My daughter entered holding a bouquet Her head was bowed, and petals almost covered half of her face, hiding herself Upon entering the room, her hand holding the bouquet trembled When she bowed and held my hand up to her forehead, they were cold She seemed to glow, and her dark skin failed to hide the redness in her cheeks

I couldn't keep myself from asking, "Who's the suitor, sweetie?"

"No one, Mama "

The flowers were in a vase before I asked the next question, "Does he even know how to play the guitar?"

"I don't like any of it at all, Mama."

Her face scrunched up in that characteristic irritation she always tries to hide, that I'm always familiar with Her father would always tell her to be more kind and lady-like, but we both knew we enjoyed her being herself

I want her to be herself, and not be someone else they tell her to be

She kept regarding the flowers, an odd mix of daisies and violets, before she picks one in her hand, "Mama, I can help you pack. Papa wants you to go."

He doesn't.

"Thanks, Vivien."

He's right not to see me tonight

"And I can cook for the both of us You'll always write to us, wouldn't you?"

Her eyes are on the flowers, her fingers holding a violet

Almost seeming to avoid my eyes.

"I will try to write every day, if I could, Viv."

I wonder if I'm able to keep that promise

"You'll come back, right?"

She regards me now, flowers forgotten.

I could not give the answer she wanted

"What do you want for dinner, Viv?

To be bound by the people she loved

I refuse to live in a home Mama tried not to lose

"Why did you leave?"

Her house is quiet, despite the soft breeze from outside

"She told me to go."

Shadows dance across the floor as the breeze sways the curtains

"Are you okay?"

The dining room turns dim with the skies outside

"I don't know."

My grandmother nods, before she regards the curtains swaying, "You're welcome to live here You can help me around the house, and I can help you get into a university "

Once I answer, the quiet becomes deafening

"I don't want to "

The quiet stretches

She looks down once she responds, "But don't you want to-..."

"I can't have you helping me."

"You're young, and naïve " She starts facing me now, the window forgotten, "No one out there will help you You're not as strong as you think you are Your mother was weak, and her mistakes made her stronger now Despite all that, she is not where she wants to be I'm just like your mother too, but

I can't say I'm better off either You can't live how I lived before, or how your mother lived before.

"We made mistakes, then

"That's not what she wanted for you."

I'm not like her

"Let me pay for my rent, at least." I couldn't look at her It almost feels like I'm begging, and I want to take back what I said somehow and leave

The shadows are long now, and so dark that I can't see the floor when I examine the floor

"I'm not a stranger, Evena."
I can't almost hear her voice

I provide no answer

"What do you want for dinner, Eve?"
To live there and never change

(In My Home.)

Bianca Marie Custodio

I was ten years young
when I first fell off my bike
flew face first towards the dirty concrete,
badly bruised my lips, my cheeks
dripped dark red,
        I let out a shriek

To my mom, I came crying,
tears trickling, the salty stinging my scratches
She winced at the wounds, bandaged the bruises,
and told me to stop
crying, to stop playing outside
        ('with that damned bike!').

She told me I was only safe at home
        (In her home)

I was sixteen years young
when I first took a trip alone with my bike
Across the city, where my dad built his own home
alone, made of dirty concrete, the clouds
dripped dark grey, heavy
rain poured over my rusting bike,
        I let out a sigh.

To my dad, I came hoping,
silently seeking a patching of pieces
again, the way he used to when I was six,
but he only winced
and told me to stop

whining, biking, to stop caring
('for that god-damned bike...').

He told me what mattered was that I was finally home
(In his home)

I remember being six
Our home smelled like cookie-cutter
Christmas stockings, plastic pines, wooden
walls, winter, wonder. A fire,
a home,
(an illusion)

I remember being happy
when a gift almost bigger than me stood out under the tree
Wrapped in golds and whites, Mom and Dad,
holding hands, held it out and tore it open for me
A bike
My bike

They told me they'd teach me to ride it someday,
that as long as I was with them I'd be safe
They told me they'd hold me until I could ride on my own,
that they'd even let me go alone! As long as I come back
home
(To my home.)

I was twenty
when I traded the old bike
for money
Twenty-six
when I tried to make my own home,
only to find that
I didn't know how to

Residency

Chrystel Therese Darbin

come back
before this soil erases your steps,
before these trees hum to a different lullaby,
before this pavement leads you to nowhere,
before this house welcomes someone else

let these walls shelter the carpenter,
let these lightbulbs lit up the electrician's face,
let these faucets clean the hands of the plumber,
let them rekindle with the engineer,
the mender, let them remember

come back
before this land forgets your name,
before your gentle touch becomes uncanny,
before your soft voice becomes too foreign,
your eyes, a tragic story.

let this place be the one who remembers you
let the snow know that you are just a visitor,
let the oceans remember that you are just a traveler –
a traveler without a map, seeking for treasures
you won't find anything there even if you dig six feet under

come back
and as you arrive, touch every corner with your rough
palms

and speak to them with your soft voice.
speak that is the only time you'll be able to,
in a language only you and this land understand

come back
and as you arrive
fill this soil with your tears and blood

Paalala: Mag-iingat ka

Anton Ilagan

Laging bilin ni Nanay, sa tuwing sasapit ang gabi ay mag doble ingat mula paaralan Bawal abutin ng hapunan at palipasin ang gutom Inuna ang 'curricular' na bagay sa halip ang sarili Siguradong magagalit si Nanay nito at sermon na naman ang abot ko

Laging bilin ni Nanay, wag madaling araw abutin Pero di bale na ito'y hindi simpleng aliw lamang Hindi rin landi kung kanino man Ito'y nagbibigay sakin ng ginhawa sa kabila ng hirap sa pagaaral Kahit anong pagsaway ko ay palaging humahantong sa away Minsan lang naman ito kaya pagbigyan mo na Pagbalik ko'y siguradong wala ng ilaw ang bahay

Laging bilin ni Nanay, wag magiisa Sa bawat lakad ko ay may ilaw na naaaninag Ako'y laging ligtas pag nakakakita ako nito Di na baleng sumakay ng jeep dahil ito'y mas delikado Mag masid lang sa paligid at maging alerto, kahit abutin pa ng alas-dose, alam kong makakabalik ako Umiwas na lang sa madilim na eskinita't bakanteng lote para di na maabala Kahit humiwalay na sa mga kasama, makakauwi naman sa aking kinaroroonan

Ang bilin sakin ni Nanay, mag aral ng mabuti, wag atupagin ang ibang bagay, basta't makatapos lang Kahit matigas ang ulo, Ma, ginagawa ko naman ang aking makakakaya Sa kabila ng sermon at saway niyo sakin, parati kong iniisip ang pagmamahal niyo na dapat kong mai-sukli Sa pamamagitan ng diploma't parangal na di ko kailanman makakamit Patawad, at dahil nagkulang ako sa mga paalala mo

Ang narinig ko kay Nanay, makinig lagi sa balita Ang tunog ng sirena ay naglilipana pag hating gabi Nagkakagulo na sa pagtakbo ng mga tao Di ko na na malayan, ako'y nakatingin na sa langit Onti-onting nawawala ang pangdinig, nangdilim ang paligid Ma, sana nayakap pa kita ng kahit sandali

Ang sabi sakin ni Nanay, "sabi ko sayo na umuwi ka na ng maaga " "Di ka nakikinig, at di man lang binigyan ng pagkakataon " "Nasayang ang kinabukasan na nakatuon para lang sayo."

Wag ka nang umiyak, ang hinagpis ng aking Nanay Ang mga luha mo'y pumapatak sa aking mukha Sa tindi ng yakap at pagsisisi, hanggang alaala na lang ang iyong mga paalaala Nakabalik na ako Nay Palaging hihintayin ang pagbalik ko

Swimming Lessons

Hunny Kyle Laurente

They say the world
runs in balance, equilibrium –
the perfect measurement
of life: These Yin-Yang,
Karma, not doing to others
what you do not want to be done
unto you, the opposite reaction
for every action executed.

Then one day, a family of four
lives on the side of the road.
And when heaven pours back what it took
from the sea, it renders the ground
to return all things abandoned,
stuck in sewers, lying around
the slender train tracks. But the family
never had anything to leave.

Amidst the city, raindrops gather
at the gutter, mount, start chasing
their own hapless breaking. Water
swells this surrender, rises to
the children's chests. This is revenge,
but as they stride and jump
along the bloated highway, revenge
is renamed as excess, and excess

in their lives is barely seasonal.
So much has been abandoned, so much
is returned. The sight, the smell, disappear

into the third-world absence of reflection,
into waves yielded by cars escaping. Unlike in the sea,
the feet touch a solid ground, floating
is impossible, but this has to be a lesson
of how not to drown.